

Senate Probes Laos Combat Aid

By Warren Unna

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The Senate moved yesterday to get to the bottom of reports that U.S. forces are quietly providing combat assistance to Laotian troops in their internal struggle with Communist insurgents.

Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.), chairman of the newly-formed Subcommittee on Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad, announced that staff members were in Laos in July and that U.S. officials in Laos would be summoned back for a subcommittee executive session in Washington on Oct. 14.

"We have been at war in Laos for years and it is time the American people knew more about the facts," he said. He promised that the sub-

committee "will seek to put on the record as much detail as possible on our involvement in that country, along with the political-military agreements, understandings and commitments that have formed the policy basis for that involvement."

Symington criticized Sen. John Sherman Cooper (R-Ky.) for demanding an investigation Thursday of reports that Army personnel and CIA agents are assisting Lao troops in combat operations.

The Missouri senator said that Cooper, a member of Symington's subcommittee, should have known that the Laos investigation already was under way.

Reports of U.S. involvement with Lao government troops came at about the same time

that the Senate passed an amendment to the military procurement authorization bill restricting funds available to U.S. forces in Laos and Thailand to prevent their assisting local troops in local warfare.

Cooper, a sponsor of the amendment, said if the reports are true, it would be an ironic answer to the Senate's vote. He then demanded investigations by the Senate Armed Services and Foreign Relations committees.

Elsewhere it was learned that what particularly annoyed Symington was Cooper's attempt to bring the Senate Armed Services Committee into the inquiry.

Symington is a member of Armed Services and Foreign Relations but the Armed

Services Committee traditionally has been sympathetic to the Pentagon's secret combat operations. Since Symington's new subcommittee is under the Foreign Relations Committee it enjoys freer reign.

The State Department emphasized yesterday that the United States had "no military presence" aside from its 19-man embassy military attaché staff in Laos.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) and Chairman John Stennis (D-Miss.) of the Senate Armed Services Committee said they had never been informed of any U.S. combat involvement in Laos' internal struggles since the 1962 Geneva Accord calling for a withdrawal of both U.S. and North Vietnamese troops.